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NSC BRIEFING

Approved For Release 2002/08/12 : CIA-RDP79R00890A001100090012-3

9 September 1959

COMMUNIST CHINA

- I. Humiliated by failure of economic programs to come up to expectations, Mao Tse-tung and his top lieutenants appear determined to recoup prestige--both domestically and internationally.
- A. Leadership, in ugly mood, is lashing out at domestic critics as "incorrigible" and guilty of "criminal activity."
- B. Strong attacks on these critics suggest that party shake-up--perhaps involving some Central Committee members, but probably not extending into Politburo--is in offing.
- C. Far from admitting failure, leaders insist that "leap forward" and commune programs are still in force, although obviously in modified form.
1. Actually, while they had to recant on wildly exaggerated claims, 1958 production was still at record high.
  2. But, during first half 1959 economic advances were far below programmed levels and leaders forced to accept much more modest goals.
  3. Prolonged drought in vital farm belt makes doubtful that even modest new agricultural goals can be reached.
  4. Little more than shell of the commune structure remains after the concessions made to dissatisfied peasants such as return of private plots, de-emphasis of communal mess halls.

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- D. It is clear that there has been considerable impairment of all-wise, father image of Mao Tse-tung, but he continues to dominate party.
  - 1. Last month's Central Committee plenum was conducted by Mao, and its resolutions describe him as the "great leader of our party."
- II. Apart from their anger at domestic critics, leaders are showing exasperation with Soviet statements critical of Chinese innovations.
  - A. Chinese are speaking derogatorily of "patterns"--implying that Soviet methods are not sacrosanct--and insists that Mao's "creative" innovations are in line with basic Marxist doctrine.
  - B. A recent editorial emphasizes that the Chinese are making remarkable progress under "their own party" and "their own leader."
  - C. At very least, Peiping hopes to end oblique Soviet criticism like Khrushchev's disparaging remarks last July in Poland on the early Soviet commune experience.
  - D. Beyond this, Peiping may press for specific Soviet endorsement of the Chinese program, perhaps from Khrushchev during his visit for National Day--1 October.
- III. It is doubtful that domestic embarrassments are primarily responsible for Peiping's truculence toward West.
  - A. But in its present mood, and given necessity of leadership to salvage prestige, the Chinese are probably less than ever disposed to retreat from positions on international issues.

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